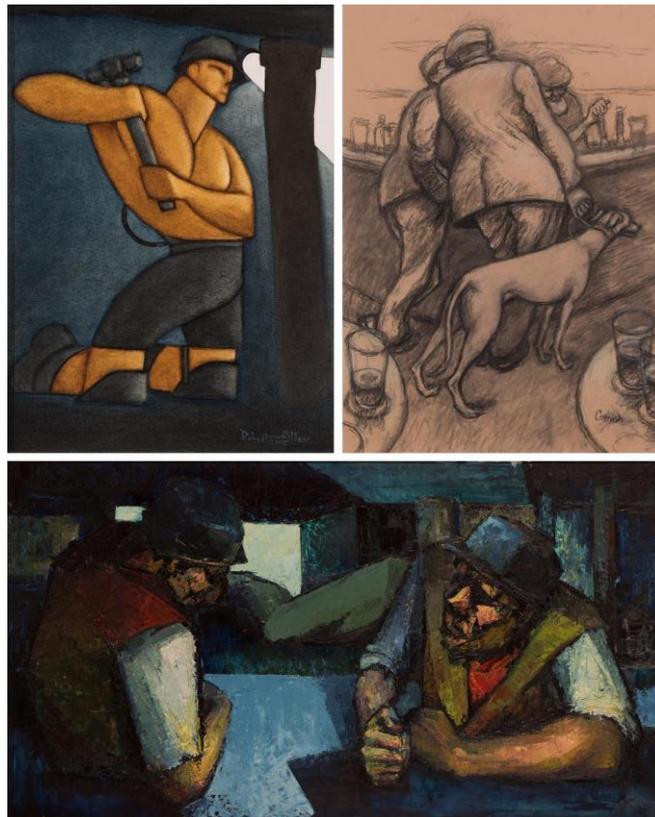




**Mining Art Gallery**  
*Understanding Life Through Art*  
**Opening 21 October 2017 in Bishop Auckland**



As part of a major regeneration of Bishop Auckland, centred around the historic Auckland Castle, The Auckland Project is launching **the UK's first gallery dedicated to Mining Art**. Opening on **21 October 2017**, the gallery will explore the development of Mining Art as a form of self-expression, and highlight its unique place within British art history.

The Gallery reveals how miners responded to their experiences through art, from the conditions they endured underground to the pit communities they returned home to. Alongside this, the gallery showcases artists who, whilst living outside mining communities, created work influenced by the industry, reflecting its national significance throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Mining Art Gallery has a focus on the art of the Great Northern Coalfield, particularly works from the Spennymoor Settlement situated only five miles from the gallery in Bishop Auckland. The works of the Spennymoor Group are displayed alongside those of the Ashington Group, based in Northumberland, and mining artists working across Yorkshire and Wales. The gallery reflects the immense significance of the British mining industry, which at its peak employed over a million men, a quarter of whom lived in the North East.

The Mining Art Gallery is situated within the Old Bank Chambers in Bishop Auckland's Market Place. Bishop Auckland is a historic market town which has been the seat of the Prince Bishops of Durham since the 12th century. The town grew significantly during the Industrial Revolution due to the rapid expansion of coal mining in the Durham area, with the industry lying at the heart of the town's economy until its decline in the late 20th century.

### **The Gemini Collection**

The Mining Art Gallery has long been an ambition of Dr. Robert McManners OBE and Gillian Wales, who have jointly amassed a major collection of artwork documenting the history of mining, known as The Gemini Collection.

In the 1990s Bob and Gillian wrote their first publication 'The Art of an Underground Miner' on the subject of Tom McGuinness, who Wales met whilst working in Bishop Auckland library. During their extensive research into the biography they began to uncover more mining artists and identified an urgent need save the art as it was in real danger of being lost. They have since purchased hundreds of works of art and become very knowledgeable, authoring the definitive book on Mining Art, 'Shafts of Light.'

Over the last two decades, Bob and Gillian have shaped The Gemini Collection into one of the most significant collections of Mining Art in Britain, revealing the remarkable creative energy of the mining community, especially in their local area. The collection, comprising over **420 artworks encompassing paintings, drawings and prints**, will form the core collection on display in the gallery.

It is a fitting tribute to the dedication of Bob and Gillian that the collection will now be permanently on display within their home town, Bishop Auckland, where the art can be enjoyed by all, as well as being further researched. The collection is still evolving with Bob and Gillian continuing commitment and involvement in the gallery, and with mining artists and their family regularly coming forward to share their work and stories.

## **Mining Art Gallery**

The story of Mining Art begins in the Victorian era with the first paintings depicting miners in their surroundings - from mining company commissions offering a romanticised view of the industry to Henry Perlee Parker's *Pitmen at Play* (1850), which realistically conveyed the conditions endured by miners.

At the heart of the gallery is the work of the mining artists themselves, offering a unique opportunity not only to see, but to empathise with, what life was like in mining communities. Paintings by artists including Tom McGuinness, Ted Holloway, Tom Lamb and Bob Olley evoke the claustrophobia and fear of life underground, whilst works by Norman Cornish, Jimmy Floyd and David Venables reveal the spirit and energy of the community which sustained life above ground.

The gallery will offer a programme of educational activities and community events inspired by the artwork on display, designed to explore the impact of mining and the evolution of Mining Art. Through an ongoing research and development programme, the Mining Art Gallery will also continue to document and enhance the local history of the region, giving a voice to those at the centre of the mining community. The gallery will be staffed largely by local volunteers, including Corinne Aspel, the daughter of Tom McGuinness.

**- ENDS -**

## **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

For all press enquiries please contact Zara Doshi at Flint on [zara.doshi@flint-pr.com](mailto:zara.doshi@flint-pr.com) / 0203 470 0094.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About The Auckland Project**

The Auckland Project, based in Bishop Auckland, is working with the community and other key partners to help raise aspirations and create opportunities through arts, heritage and a culture of learning.

As part of this long-term ambition, the charity\* is developing a visitor destination of international significance, including visitor hub Auckland Tower, Spanish Art Gallery, Deer Park, Walled Garden, Faith Museum and the restored Auckland Castle, once home to the Prince Bishops of Durham.

The first of these new attractions, the Mining Art Gallery, will open in Bishop Auckland on October 21 2017, with the others launching in stages over the next three years.

The Auckland Project's dedicated Engagement Team is also working closely with schools and community groups to deliver a range of life changing programmes for all ages, designed to increase educational attainment, enhance employability, boost community spirit and improve health and wellbeing for current and future generations.

By 2020 the charity aims to create 8,000 opportunities for learning and skills development, including 60 apprenticeships.

To date, more than £130m has been committed to the Project, including £11.4m thanks to National Lottery players via the Heritage Lottery Fund.

For more information, and a full list of supporters, please visit [aucklandproject.org](http://aucklandproject.org).

\*From September 2017, Auckland Castle Trust will be known as The Auckland Project.



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